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Sweet Home Alabama???

226th makes a home away from home

By Spc. Petersi Liu, CFLCC PAO

CAMP ARIFJAN, Kuwait - When the Alabama National Guard's 226th Area Support Group of Mobile, Ala., heard in August they were going to be here 365-days-boots-on-the-ground, they rose up with hammers, shovels and boards. It was not in rebellion but to settle in and make their living quarters more homey.

"We realized we were going to be here for quite a while, so we decided to build a place we can call home," said Master Sgt. Mike Gideons, noncommissioned-officer-in-charge of food service operations for the 226th.

By mid-October, their off-duty-hours labors resulted in a two-story four-seat sundeck with a ladder, a lounge bar with dartboards, a camouflage net-covered patio with a grill, a golf putting green, a horseshoe pit, flower beds, hanging basket of flowers, a bird feeder and a garden with watermelons and tomatoes.

These quality of life improvement projects took about eight people over two months. The construction started with wooden floor extensions outside the entrance of the tents. Benches, railings and a sundeck were added later as people build projects during their off time, Gideons said.

"The projects gave us something meaningful to do in our spare time," said Master Sgt. George Love, a food service technician for the 226th.

For instance, when Gideons and Love were off-duty, they hung around the "B.O.G. (for boots on ground) 365 Lounge", which had a wooden bar with a cooler underneath for sodas, non-alcoholic beers and other beverages. Two dartboards are eight feet from the bar. Just outside of the lounge are flowerbeds made from sandbags double stacked in a row to hold the potting soil.

The lounge's construction materials came from stockpiles of wood that the 226th brought to the theater, Love said.

"We thought we were going to Iraq, so we arrived in theater with a bunch of wood material for constructing living quarters there," said Maj. Matt Burinskas, the contract officer of the 226th.

"However, when we arrived, we found out we are staying here. The U.S. Customs would not allow us to bring the wood back to the States. It's untreated wood."

Therefore, Burinskas came up with the idea to use the wood to fix up their quarters. The modifications more than doubled the amount of living space.

Maj. Jack Wallace, the 226th's deputy



Master Sgt. George Love and Lt. Col. Terry Moorer, the 226th's staff judge advocate, speak of the watermelon garden as a project that has a tasty return value.

staff judge advocate, decided to beautify the area by planting flower gardens around the Force Provider tents.

"If this was your home in Alabama, you would have done the same -- plant a beautiful garden," Wallace said.

He first took some watermelon and tomato seeds from the dining facility and sprouted them in coffee cups until they were ready to be placed in one of his gardens. He later obtained various types of flowers and vines from a nursery in downtown Kuwait City.

"One of the water sources for the gardens comes from the half drunk water bottles we find around here. That way the water does not go to waste," Wallace said.

The cost of the gardens so far has come to around three hundred dollars out of Wallace's own pocket, but the real cost, he said, was time -- time to water and nurture the plants and give them the tender loving care they need to survive in the harsh environment. It has been worthwhile considering the impact it has on the people, according to Wallace.

"Some neighbors saw my gardens and complimented them. Some liked the plants so much that they donated six to eight dollars for additional garden projects," Wallace said. "In return, I have given them a small plant in a coffee cup as a gift."

With all these home improvements they've made to their living quarters, one might wonder how difficult it will be to get them to leave after their 365 days are up.



Master Sgt. George Love, a food service technician, Maj. Matt Burinskas, a contract officer and Master Sgt. Mike Gideons, noncommissioned-officer-in-charge of food service operations, built a place they can call home. (Photos by Spc. Petersi Liu)



Spotlight

On a special Veterans' Day message

By Donna Miles, American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON— Nearly everyone has experienced it at one time or another: an airport bogged down by bad weather, delayed and cancelled flights, and cranky, overtired travelers wanting nothing more than to get to their destinations.

That's exactly what Will Ross, an administrative judge for the Defense Department's Office of Hearings and Appeals in Los Angeles, encountered Oct. 27 at Baltimore/Washington International Airport.

But what he witnessed that day, he said, "made me proud to be an American, and also told me why we will win this war (on terrorism)."

Like many of his fellow passengers, Ross had been forced to spend the night in Baltimore. His outbound flight, scheduled for the night before, had been cancelled due to the California wildfires. They had forced the Los Angeles International Airport to close, and the ripple effect drove domestic travel nationwide into a tailspin.

As he waited in the terminal, Ross noticed many soldiers in their desert camouflage uniforms, newly arrived from Southwest Asia. All, like Ross and the other passengers at the airport, were awaiting connecting flights — but in the soldiers' case, it was to begin two weeks of rest and recuperation leave.

Flight delays continued and the airport had become, in Ross's words, "a zoo." By the afternoon, one flight to Denver had been delayed several hours. United Airlines agents kept asking for volunteers to give up their seats and take another flight, but Ross said they weren't getting many takers.

Finally, Ross said a United Airlines spokeswoman got on the public address system and made a desperate plea. "Folks, as you can see, there are a lot of soldiers in the waiting area," the agent said. "They only have 14 days of leave, and we're trying to get them where they need to go without spending any more time in an airport than they have to."

"We sold them all tickets knowing we would oversell the flight. If we can, we want to get them all on this flight. We want all the soldiers to know ... we respect what you're doing, we are here for you and we love you," the agent continued.

"The entire terminal of cranky, tired, travel-weary people -- a cross-section of America -- broke into sustained and heartfelt applause," Ross said. "We're talking about several hundred people applauding, a whole terminal."

"The soldiers looked surprised and very modest," he continued. "Most of them just looked at their boots." Many of the travelers in the terminal wiped away tears.

"And, yes," Ross said, "people lined up to take the later flight and all the soldiers went to Denver on that flight." Ross said he figured that 30 or 40 people had suddenly jumped at the chance to offer their seats to U.S. soldiers. That moment, he said, reinforced his patriotism and his heartfelt belief that the United States will prevail in the war on terror.

"I think people realized that this fight is going to be long and drawn-out, and these kids are in the thick of it," he said. "It was heartwarming to see their outpouring of support."

Soldier Talk

How has being deployed changed your feelings about Veterans' Day?



It makes me realize that veterans are getting younger these days.

**Sgt. 1st Class
Raul Baird**
800th MP Bde.



Being a veteran yourself, it takes on a different meaning and makes it more personal.

**Sgt. Nydga
Reed**
377th TSC



I've always respected the sacrifices of our veterans in the past...even more so now.

**Capt. John
Yuste**
171st ASG



Having deployed gives a greater appreciation of what veterans have gone through.

**Maj. Matthew
Sims**
469th Finance Grp



It helps me understand all the sacrifices that soldiers in previous wars made.

**First Sgt.
Michael Nelson**
469th Finance Grp



I am a veteran now - Veterans' Day is my holiday.

**Sgt. Chasta
Clark**
461st PSB

News Briefs



Last stop of maiden voyage... The USNS Lance Cpl Roy M. Wheat completed its maiden voyage on Nov. 1 when tugs assisted it into the port of Shuaiba. The Wheat, which was named for the Moselle, Miss. native who sacrificed his life in Viet Nam to save the lives of two other Marines, will be used for Marine prepositioned equipment. It is capable of carrying about 200,000 feet of roll on/roll off and container cargo and will carry additional capabilities such as an expeditionary airfield, a naval construction battalion and a fleet hospital. (Photo by Maj. Bobby Hart)

Reservists get alerted

(From The New York Times) WASHINGTON — The Pentagon began alerting 43,000 Reserve and National Guard troops late Wednesday for the possibility of yearlong duty in Iraq or Kuwait as part of a force-rotation plan that would reduce the overall American military presence in Iraq by next spring, senior Pentagon officials said.

The alert warnings and deployment orders approved by Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld on Wednesday reflected concern by Pentagon officials and the administration over stresses that large mobilizations have placed on reservists and their families. These, in turn, have prompted complaints in Congress.

The orders were drafted to give the troops maximum warning about their possible duty and to ensure that the bulk of them had not already been called up since Sept. 11, 2001, senior Pentagon officials said.

The plan would draw down total American forces in Iraq to about 105,000 troops from 130,000 in the midst of next year's presidential election campaign. Pentagon planners have sought to limit additional call-ups of National Guard and Reserve forces beyond combat units identified months ago, but ultimately realized that, at the very least, logistics units would be required in the next rotation.

Congress agrees on Reserve health care

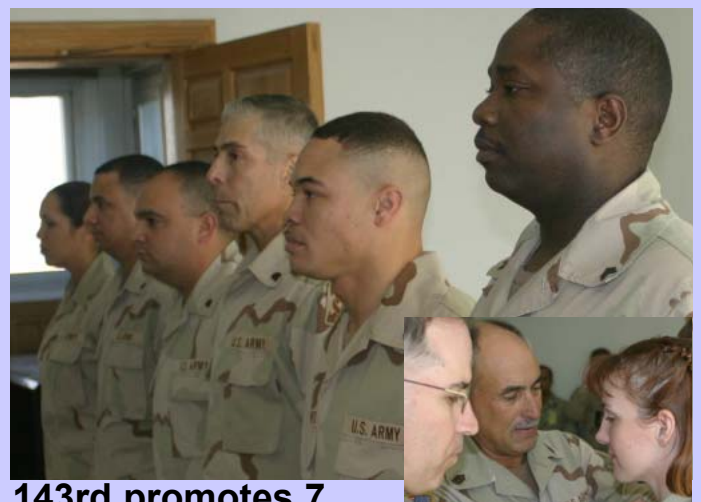
(From Military.com) Congress has agreed upon a new Reserve Component health care as part of the Iraq supplemental. A one-year trial will be implemented with these four major provisions: TRICARE Buy-In, TRICARE upon Receiving Orders, Extension of TRICARE Eligibility after Demobilization, and Authorization for Additional Medical Screening. For more details on each major provision, see <http://www.leahy.senate.gov/vermont/national%20guard/guard-care100910.html>

Local soldiers looking for fellow alumni

Two soldiers at Arifjan are looking for alumni from their respective alma maters with whom to take a group photo to send back to the universities. Maj. Tim Pirlo--University of Central Florida--and Capt. Andre Dancy--Western Illinois University--said interested people should call Pirlo at 825-1542 or Dancy at 825-2244.

Retirement pay increases by 2.1 percent

(From Military.com) Payments to military retirees will include a 2.1 percent cost of living allowance increase based on figures announced by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The COLA also affects federal retired pay, VA disability compensation, SBP survivor annuities and Social Security. The COLA for these programs will be effective Dec. 1, and will be reflected in checks issued on Jan. 2, 2004.



143rd promotes 7...

Brig. Gen. Ennis C. Whitehead III and Command Sgt. Maj. Joe Resendes promoted (L-R) Sgt. Emily Catala, Sgt. Alexaviel Hernandez, Sgt. Edwin Rodriguez, Sgt. Heriberto Velez, Staff Sgt. Damon Crawford, Staff Sgt. Troy Jones and (insert) Staff Sgt. Heather Romero during a ceremony at the port of Shuaiba.

(Photos by Maj. Bobby Hart)



Pfc. Mayra Perez (right) of the 394th AG from Long Beach, Calif., a 3rd PERSCOM subordinate unit, helps a customer at the post office counter at the Arifjan APO.



Spc. Kenneth Ross teaches a course on Microsoft Access to soldiers of the 3rd PERSCOM.

Computer Age War

The heavy reliance on computers for units like the 3d PERSCOM from Jackson, Miss. makes one wonder how we ever went to war without them.

(Photos by Staff Sgt. Nate Orme)



Spc. Joi Singletary works for the 3rd PERSCOM HHC.



Sgt. Eddie Williams, a member of the 3rd PERSCOM network team, rebuilds a computer.

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